DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 078 543 EA 005 201

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TITLE Supervision and Curriculum: Improvements for Transition.
PUB DATE 18 Mar 73
NOTE 18p.; Speech given before Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Annual Conference (28th, Minneapolis, Minnesota, March 17-21, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Change; Educational Innovation; Educational Philosophy; *Humanization; *School Environment; *School Improvement; *Speeches

ABSTRACT

The basic thesis of this paper is that less hassles, less interference, new cultural values, and current social trends make "now" a good time for improving schools. The author suggests that change is slow in coming because administrators are reluctant to take action while they are still in the throes of a dilemma over whether schools should reflect or try to change society. The paper discusses the role conflict confronting a professional educator who is expected to be inspirational and toughminded, idealistic and realistic, and dreamer and pragmatist simultaneously. The paper concludes with some specific recommendations aimed at humanizing the schools. (Author/DN)

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SUPERVISION AND CURRICULUM: IMPROVEMENTS FOR TRANSITION

An Address to the ASCD Annual Conference
March 18, 1973

This paper pivots around the concept of "transition," a concept which has become and increasingly popular way of characterizing the current state of the culture. It is a compelling and intriguing idea but it is also of dubious value as a frame of reference for action in education. More specifically, I want to point out the dangers of using a concept like transition as an excuse or reason for doing nothing.

I sense a creeping paralysis among educators disillusioned and depressed about recent events in the field and in the larger social and cultural scene. There is a great deal of disappointment even rejection of existing ideas, forms, and structures of organized education some of it strong enough to drive a few to surrender and a larger number to despair. Out of this despair, one senses wistful hopes and yearnings for a renaissance. This kind of wishful thinking is easily encouraged by the existence of a transition theory that says that we may be at the edge of a new golden age and that the current difficulties are but the necessarily confused and conflicting cross currents of the old and the new merging. It is waiting for this golden age that strikes me as dangerous - the dawdling and elusion of marking time until someone or something happens to take us out of all this misery. We have a history of waiting - we have waited for Lefty, for Godot, and for others, but that waiting seems often to have been in vain. And yet we wait and hope for a number of events. First of all, many of us wait for a new Messiah - a new educational prophet who will

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present brilliant new syntheses of the best psychological, philosophical, and pedagogical thinking. We want a new John Dewey, a new George Counts, as if they or any other giant were single-handedly able to significantly effect what actually goes on in schools. Others wait for the social climate to change. No doubt the social climate will change and probably several times during anyone's career. We have just been through a time when there was a climate very sympathetic and conducive to significant educational change and yet, I feel, we fell far short of what we might have achieved. That was a time, of course, when there was lots of money available for education and many of us mourn most grievous the disappearance of the dollars. However, in all honesty and candor, can we categorically deny the accusation that a great deal of the money of the sixties was squandered, misspent, and misallocated.

Still others wait for significant and humane political leadership but the current guidance from politicians can hardly be said to be either inspiring or imaginative. It seems to me that the politicians are also waiting for the winds to calm before they dare to suggest course and direction. Many of us also yearn for the rational resolution of some very thorny and complex issues - Should we force integration or promote cultural pluralism? Is behavior modification humane? Who should decide the curriculum? How can and should we rate teachers? Should we give grades? Rational solution, of course, involves careful analysis and weighing of evidence, the price of which is often neutralized paralysis. Rather than decide, many are prepared to wait for the time when added wisdom and knowledge will enable us to decide. I say that after the transition will come transition and I say to hell with it. I say the time to act is and always has been now.

My basic thesis, then, is that right now is as good as anytime, and in some ways better than other times, for making schools better. Furthermore, that the major stumbling blocks to these changes are the lack of will and the failure of resolution and not the absence of great ideas and people nor the lack of gold. Let me say now, and I will elaborate on this later - what I mean by making schools better. What I have in mind is more humane institutions, ones that are sensitive to the right of every individual to a sense of dignity and self-worth. Before developing that point, let me first indicate why I feel that there are certain conditions now present that are conducive to furthering this goal.

First of all, unlike the sixties there really are some powerful ideas around, solid and compelling ideas that are directed at developing valid and humane education. There are, for example, the ideas centered in what is often called open-education, the brilliant model of schools contained in the Oliver and Newman essay, the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, the 10th ASCD Year Book, and the creative curriculum planning in the Hosher and Sprinthall experiments in psychological education. These are obviously my own set of favorites but I dare say that we could all point to recent writings and practices that strike us both bold and sensible.

Secondly, in a real sense there is more freedom for educators. Some of the major constraints on providing for education for personal dignity and growth have significantly eased. Certainly, for example, it is much more difficult now-a-days to justify a secondary school curriculum on the basis of college requirements. Not only are colleges more flexible about requirements, they are much more eager to get students and hence a lot less obsessive about the attendant details. Perhaps even more basic is the decreasing reliance on the schools as the guarantor of a job. The recent data in Christopher Jencks'

book tends to support what many practitioners have felt for a long time, namely that specific school practices are not necessarily closely connected with occupational level. Although many are in despair about the trend towards skepticism about the relationship between school and job, it in a very real sense could be seen as a liberating force. This is not to mean that schools should not be concerned with the capacity of its graduates to earn a decent living, but it does mean that schools might be released of some of the unreasonable demands in this area and be freer to concentrate on goals like personal growth. We have had an unfortunate problem of talking out of both sides of our mouth on this problem for much of our rhetoric has to do with education for personal fulfillment, for citizenship, and for the intrinsic value of scholarship but yet, in practice we have geared much of the school program for social and economic advancement. Perhaps we are now in a better position to reduce this ambiguity.

A third basis for my contention that this is <u>not</u> the worst of times has to do with the remarkable increase in the acceptance of diversity and pluralism as appropriate values for the public schools. I, by no means, am trying to convince anyone that we as a nation have come to accept, tolerate, and value cultural and individual differences to the degree that it matches Brotherhood Week rhetoric. An yet there <u>has</u> been a cooling of the melting pot - there are alternative schools within the public school structure - there is a growing acceptance, however reluctant, of real differences in life-styles. This growing disposition to demand that public schools respond to a variety of cultural needs and aspirations and in a differentiated manner may turn out to be one of the most significant events of the century. There is growing impatience with the monopolistic and monolithic tendencies of public schools and, increasingly, savvy school administrators have attempted to

diversify, to differentiate, and to accept the difficult but stubborn reality that schools serve a variety of publics. My own feeling is that it is a little easier now to organize experimental or pilot programs within the present structure than it was, say ten or fifteen years ago. Although, most school administrators like to point with pride to a school system where one school is equivalent to another, an increasing number are proud that theirs is a system where the schools are quite different from one another.

It should be pointed out that the major leadership for this direction has come from groups outside education - such as Blacks, Chicanos, Indians, and women's groups striving for their liberation and identity. It is to groups such as these that we in education can look to for invaluable support and assistance.

A fourth aspect of my analysis is perhaps more paradoxical for it has to do with the dramatic decrease in various large national programs in education principally funded by the federal government and private foundations. It seems to me that the massive, well-financed, highly organized national movements for major school reforms are, if not dead, hardly bursting with vitality. This may not be an altogether unfortunate development for it may possibly free practitioners from the pressure of responding to outside standards of purity and perfection and therefore allow them the opportunity to seek salvation in local though more modest terms. To a very large extent, the heat is off and although many university professors have lost fat consultancies and many corporations have smaller sales, this cooler temperature may encourage and require more individual thought and action.

If you can't rely on the University or the Corporation and if the Ford Foundation is bored and the Office of Education is broke, then maybe we ought to go back to a phenomenon of another generation, that of do-it-yourself.

There is indeed much less money, but that means there is that much less energy needed to figure out how who should spend it, who should get it, and how can it be manipulated to pay for things it wasn't intended to pay for in the first place. Yes, there are fewer national curriculum packages but that should free people from reacting to them, testing them, comparing them, revising them, buying them, studying them, training in them. Perhaps we could turn our attention away from "them" to particular children, in particular schools, in a particular time like now.

We don't seem to have to worry so much now about such nonsense as catching up with the Russians, maintaining standards in mathematics, producing more scientists, or even building more submarines. What a relief and what an opportunity. In all, there just seems to be a whole lot fewer people looking over our shoulders and kibbitzing which ought to be a great source of relief. I won't comment, by the way, on the many-splendored fair weather friends of education.

In a similar vein, we can look to the decline in public interest in the schools as something not wholly devoid of value. Mind you, I am convinced that we as a profession will never be able to effect significant changes in the school without serious public involvement, understanding, and support. However, the particular nature of current public apathy is I believe a little different than the traditional indifference of which there is still far too much. A large part of the public's current boredom with schools comes out of disappointment and disenchantment. We promised the public that if we paid teachers better, put carpets on the classroom floors, bought lots of projectors, and sent administrators to sensitivity training workshops that the Messiah would find his coming redundant. A lot of people now think that it hasn't quite worked out that way and as a matter of fact what has developed is a bit of a mess.

A mess in this sense - lots of people felt that if they supported "good schools" and "quality education" their children would learn and grow a lot - that they would go to good colleges, get good jobs and live happily ever after. Well in spite of staff differentiation, the new math, and five-sided tables, life has been kind of, shall we say, difficult for young people. This is not to say that parents blame the schools for the economic difficulties and the cultural malaise that afflicts so many of us. However, many of them now have some mighty deep reservations about the miraculous benefits that derive from sending even more dollars to the schools.

However, this is the kind of mood that could mean at the very least some reduction in strident and harsh demands on the schools. More importantly, it could lead to some sober and thoughtful reconsideration of both the limits and potentials of schools. It is the kind of attitude that could channel public energy away from worrying whether a particular school was keeping up with the latest wrinkle to being concerned with the problems of particular students in a particular school that are relevant to them here and now.

Another promising development is the growing concern for the preservation of individual integrity and responsibility in the face of the immense power of institutions and organizations. America has not been totally greened into consciousness III by the counter-culture but we certainly have witnessed a significant rise in sensitivity to human and personal rights, to the subtle and not so subtle encroachments of freedom, and to the necessity for being in Jefferson's words, "eternally vigilant to all forms of tyranny over the minds of man." As ASCD members we can only be grateful to note the growing correspondence between the traditional values of this organization and those in the larger society. Not only have we as a society grown more psychologically hip and sophisticated

e committed to human values - to goals of personal
but we seem to have more peop lf-understanding, to positive human relations as
fulfillment, actualization, s titiveness, aggressiveness, and conformity. It
opposed to the values of comp estimate the extent that these values are held
is easy to exaggerate and ove e in evidence and certainly the ideas are more
but clearly they seem much mo neration ago. At the very least, one can say
accessible than they were a g developing a school program that really means
that an educator interesed in understanding should have no difficulty in
to stress personal growth and erative constituency. It is even possible to
finding an agreeable and coop the parents and children just possibly might
conjure up a situation where se values than a school person or two. Some
be a step or two more into th said ten years ago, "I just read Admiral Rickover,
of the parents who might have read Carl Rogers and..."
and," are now saying, "I just

The last piece of suppo rting evidence for my notion that these days are
reasonable ones in which to d worthwhile things in the schools has to do with
the mood of our profession. Obviously, it would be treacherous to try to
characterize such an enormous and varied group of people but I think it fair
to say that there are a large number of professionals who are profoundly
dissatisfied with the status quo and are predisposed and prepared to work for
significant changes. Indeed, I feel that there are many who are in considerable
anguish about the disparity b etween what they feel should be done and what is
in fact being done. We are a n increasingly articulate and sophisticated
profession sensitive to the d eepest and most human aspirations and yet we seem
to be unable to harness our r esources and talents to respond in ways that are
qualitatively satisfying. Th e same can be said for our power, particularly the
power of teachers. Teacher's organizations now have enormously more muscle and

clout that potentially could have an important impact on the quality of education. However, the harsh reality is that this new power has been so far used primarily for improving wages and working conditions and insufficiently for transforming the schools so that they are less harmful to children. Sad to say but it seems to me that the organized profession has so far failed to be a major force in making schools humane places.

These reservations about the capacity for the profession to make for better schools brings me to the "But Yet" portion of this talk. I have tried to sketch out a variety of conditions that say to me, "We don't have to spend our time weeping over the end of the golden era and wait through the transition for the new even bigger golden goose. There are some things - less hassles, less interference, certain cultural values and social trends, that add up to a notion that we are right now in a fairly propitious time to make schools really decent and humane places." BUT YET - something <u>is</u> wrong - there is in fact, a malaise, a hesitancy, people are down, things are not happening - there is a hesitation and reluctance that approaches paralysis. Why? - let me suggest some reasons.

First of all, we are as a profession surprisingly hesitant about being effective. We are often tortured about manipulating children, imposing values, and throttling individuality. Certainly these are legitimate concerns - indeed they are the profound and eternal dilemmas that have and always will confound educators. However, restraint of power and sensitivity to individuality are not the same as timidity and irresponsibility. The irony, of course, is that more times than not it is the educator with the reactionary and arbitrary value systems that seem free to act on their values while those who are deeply committed to human values, to freedom, and dignity are the ones frozen, often by their own ideology, into anguished inertia. There is a kind of squeamish

gentility that often inhibits thoughtful and decent educators from acting on their commitment in a resolute and determined manner.

I believe, that in addition to this rather pervasive timidity and reluctance to act there is another aspect for our current inaction and that is our wishy washiness on the role of the schools. The ancient question still reverberates as strongly as ever: Is the school a reflection of society or "does the school dare create a new social oreder?"! Recent political events have exacerbated the issues and the net result is more ambivalence than ever. The recent years have witnessed many courageous acts of defiance to the established order, numerous challenges for drastic and fundamental breaks with traditional values and policies, and eloquent pleas for the responsible members of society to take the leadership for valid basic changes lest it go to the unstable by default. Yet there has been a serious public backlash to these efforts part of which is punitive and negative in character but part of which legitimately raises the question of the limits of elitism and arrogance. Should the schools serve a community even if the community wants what we may think are inappropriate goals? Is what we mean by social leadership cajoling an indifferent or trusting community to go along with ideas that they can barely digest? Moreover, there are those who feel that a position of social leader is much too burdensome, too awesome for them to assume and feel it appropriate to wait modestly and humbly for the guidance of others.

What, then, do we make of all of this? I see ourselves living in a time when conditions for making schools more humane are reasonably good but we lack the will and resolve to act and moreover are willing and even eager to wait for various events or people to take us through a convenient period called transition. My personal response is based on a quotation attributed to Rabbi Tarfon, who said in the Book of the Fathers, "The work is not yours to finish, but neither are you free to take no part in it."

This says several things to me - First, that we must accept the reality that we will not be able to actually accomplish our most cherished goals - that tasks like achieving personal fulfillment and social justice are too vast and too emphermeral to be translated into what are called "terminal objectives." It says to me that the notion that we can actually accomplish such goals may be a poignant example of man's efforts to delude himself about his own rather limited and modest powers. To aspire to unreachable goals defines nobility but to expect to reach them expresses vanity, pretentiousness and concern for self-gratification. There is, however, a very large HOWEVER. Granted our limitations, the finite qualities of our abilities to deal with the immense complexities of life, and granted it would be presumptious for any individual in a particular time and place to expect dramatic results, I grant all that but that definitely and most assuredly does not justify copping, bowing, or dropping out, however anguished and agonized is the sense of futility. There can be no justification for anyone committed to social justice to withdraw from the battlefield because the flack is noisy and the war has not been won. If this is true for us as human beings how much even more significant it if for us as professionals. As a matter of fact, it may be that in this consideration we may find the critical characteristics of a professional. As human beings we are motivated in our work by several factors such as recognition, achievement, and power. However, as professionals we accept another consideration as a substantial generator of our behavior, namely, commitment to a client. The difficulty for us as professionals and human beings is that there are conflicts between human needs and aspirations and professional responsibilities. In this particular case, I have specific reference to the natural and legitimate need we have as people to have a sense of closure, a feeling of definite achievement, a pride in accomplishment. Contrast that with the view that, "the work is not

yours to finish." As professionals, we have to forego some of the hopes and dreams that are ours by birth in order that we faithfully discharge responsibilities that we have deliberately chosen. In a word, we have to learn to live with the tension that occurs in the wake of working very hard for goals we know we cannot accomplish. We need to both project goals that exceed our grasp and to accomplish that which is within our grasp. If that doesn't lead to frustration then I don't know what does. As you probably have figured out by now, frustration isn't a great deal of fun. In order to avoid that frustration we have tried several things. Some of us set reachable but modest goals and characterize them as reachable but profound. Others of us set up profound but unreachable goals and spend our careers anguishing about their unreachability. Still others, like me, spend a lot of energy pointing all this out.

Perhaps, then, the professional is a tragic figure - one motivated by the highest aspirations of the society and the profession to work for goals that his training and experience tell him are at best very difficult to attain. He is expected to be both inspirational and tough-minded, idealistic and realistic, dreamer and pragmatist. The mark of the true professional, then, could be said to be the capacity to deal with that duality, to see the tension as creative rather than disabling, and the ability to act resolutely in spite of the very strong possibility that this will lead to personal frustration, loneliness, and dissatisfaction.

I do not want to finish this talk without some definite recommendations that reflect my own educational values and are consistent with my analysis of the institutional and social contexts in which we now work.

I have suggestions that to me are at once modest and daring, simple but profound, and most importantly attainable, but ethically sound. Very simply, I urge us all to devote the bulk of our energies to supporting and promoting

personal dignity. That may not sound so startling or very new, but I really mean what I say. I am suggesting that we act on that principle on all fronts. For example, let us worry much, much less about the disciplines - let us pay only passing attention to the math scores, to the language labs, to the selection of the history texts. Let us devote the energy, imagination, and thought that has gone into those kind of questions to the question of how can we help people feel better about themselves and each other. Let the history teacher ask himself or herself questions like - what can I do today to help my students, my colleagues, and myself maintain a satisfying level of personal dignity? and, what will the impact of the rule about missing exams be on the sense of personal well-being for various class members? before questions like, what concept shall I emphasize in today's class or which questions should I ask on the exam?

If we feel we must measure what we do let us devote energies allocated to developing barometers to devices that will guage the dignity quotient for classes and individuals. Perhaps it will be a crude yardstick but better a yeardstick that measures important qualities crudely than one that accurately measures trivial qualities.

Teachers would be selected, promoted, or fired on the basis of their ability to sustain personal dignity and positive self-regard. Hard to measure? Sure, but think of the value of teachers trying to convince their evaluators of how effective they are in supporting individual dignity.

Let us spend much less time worrying about organization, about finances, about scheduling, even about curriculum. I would go so far as to consider forgetting about change except that of concentrating energies and resources on the support of human dignity. Keep what you now have - just stop fussing about everything (or at least fuss a lot less) except for this concern. Let this one

concern permeate everything that we do - let it be the continuous, persistent question - let us devote ourselves to the process of responding to the challenge in all its complexity, elusiveness, and subtlety. Of course, human dignity is difficult to define. Of course, there are profound differences in its definition and naturally, there are serious differences of opinion on how to enhance a sense of personal well-being. But is is in the human condition to have such difficulties and differences and certainly it must be more worthwhile to spend energies on wrestling with the issue of promoting human dignity than on behavioral objectives, differentiated staffing, the use of media, and competence based teacher education. If we are going to sweat and bleed, let us at least sweat and bleed over worthwhile matters.

Here is a list of specific things you can do right now to increase the dignity quotient in your schools:

1. Eliminate as much as possible all forms of punishment - physical or psychological.
2. Abolish all forms of competitiveness from athletic games to honor rolls.
3. Let students go to the bathroom when they want.
4. Let everyone have an hour for lunch.
5. Abolish compulsory education after the sixth grade.
6. Give every teacher an office.
7. Let the teachers elect the principals and department chairpeople.
8. Insist that the professional organizations drum out of its memberships and schools the various misfits and child haters that find haven in the schools at the expense of children.
9. Elimante bells, squawk boxes, all passes of any kind, report cards, and truant officers.

10. Make the bullying of children by other children, teachers, secretaries, custodians, or administrators the most serious offense in the school and one that cannot be tolerated.

11. Tell the truth, the whole truth to the public.

Obviously, this particular list is subject to criticism and debate although I consider the topics to be of great importance. I would urge you to make your own list and/or be prepared to defend every single blessed thing you do as being the best possible way imaginable to make schools decent and humane places. You have the right - no, you are required to be skeptical about these and other specific proposals but you have the parallel responsibility to think, reflect, and act and not just simply scoff and sleep.

What about the problems to such an approach? First, what about the criticism that this would severely jeopardize other educational goals? This is a legitimate question and I would urge each of us to consider what the effects of spending more energy on striving for personal dignity might have on achieving traditional school goals. Personally, I think the capacity to achieve the valid ones would if anything be enhanced. For example, there is considerable evidence that learning is related to positive self-concept. If serious efforts and considerable energy were exerted towards achieving dignity for students, is it not highly probable that the traditional tensions and troubles would diminish? What about jobs? Well, are existing school practices helping students get jobs? What are the qualities that help people find good jobs? Obviously, there are many other serious and complicated related questions but I have faith in the value of raising them in challenge to the principle that the development of personal dignity should be the central school focus.

A second problem and perhaps one of the most difficult, ironically enough, is professionalism. Education with a capital E has become so organized,

so encrusted with special interest groups, so singular in its institutional pursuits that it has become a factor in itself for or against change. Unfortunately, these groups often seem to value survival more than mission and they are usually endowed with enormous vitality and ferocity when survival becomes an issue. How organizations like the National Association for the Preservation and Sanctification of the Teaching of Babylonian Pornography would react to my suggestions is not hard to predict. Not only does the association welcome and applaud the recommendations but it feels that the study of Babylonian Pornography more than anything else enhances personal dignity and the recommendations supports its long standing contention that more Babylonian Pornography is needed in the schools. This being the case, it will be necessary to have workshops to train those not sufficiently informed on Babylonian Pornography. These workshops would obviously be for teachers and para-professionals and a related organization, the National Association of Administrators of Babylonian Pornography Programs would provide assistance to universities seeking approval from the National Council to Accredit Babylonian Pornography Educational Personnel. The NCABPEP to be more accurate.

A third concern involves difficulties of implementation. These proposals are deceptively simple for they represent a fundamental change of attitude towards the nature of schools. The implications are enormous and far reaching and even though implementation would require no additional funds (it might even save some money) no additional equipment, no bond issues, etc., it does require something much more difficult and costly, namely changes in values. Changing values is no small thing and the process of trying can produce considerable anxiety, frustration, and resistance. Changes of the quality that I am suggesting could of course lead to serious and bitter controversy since they can be seen as being in fundamental conflict with other traditional and valid points of view.

How then can we deal with the complexities and subtleties involved in implementing changes of this magnitude? I have already tried hard to convince you that these are pretty reasonable times to make such changes - there are fewer demands, less distractions, more interest in humanism and diversity, a readiness among many professionals, et. al. Let me make three additional suggestions.

First, I urge us to significantly involve the public in discussions of fundamental educational issues. I urge us to speak boldly and candidly to the public not about class size, phonics, or team teaching but about the life and death issues of education, of the school as a dehumanizing institution, and of the intellectual and spiritual sterility of most current school practices.

Secondly, I urge my university colleagues to become much more active in the struggle to make schools more humane. William Sloane Coffin, Jr. has said that the trouble with academics is not that they fiddle while Rome burns but that they would much rather examine their fiddles! It is time for us to stop fiddling and diddling around with task forces on undergraduate teacher education programs, surveys on how many schools have programs in sex education, and research on what it takes to get a pigeon to scratch its back. All that may be interesting but surely all that talent and energy could be put to more important and urgent matters.

Thirdly, I urge school administrators to decentralize fundamentally, to not only allow but to help local principals and teachers deal with the concern for making the school a dignified and humane institution. Dismantle your sophisticated and elaborate central office and use its human resources to provide moral, psychological, and intellectual support to teachers and principals committed to these goals. Be accountable not to accountants' and statisticians' demands but to the yearnings of teachers and students to live with pride and confidence.

There can be no greater example of savage irony than to say that it will take enormous efforts to make our schools into places where people can work with a sense of dignity and good will. Ironic or not, difficult or not, "we are not free to take no part in those efforts."